1: Federal W-5 (no date) 1986
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duh seamstress fuh duh slabes. She make mos all dey weah."

When we asked her if she ever heard that dreaming about a snake "meant anything," the old woman replied, "Yes, ma'am, dat mean yuh got a enemy.[51] Not many nights ago I dream bout a snake an uh sho wuz sked wen uh wake up."

They both laughed and Susie leaned over and tapped Sophie on the arm and said, "Oh yes, deah's lots uh dem tings bout babies. Wen dey bawn wid a caul, das sho a sign dey will be bery wise an kin talk wid duh spirits.[4] Ain dasso, Sophie?"

Agreeing, Sophie hastened to add what she had heard about babies born with teeth. "Dey will hab bad luck all deah libes.[66] Dat sho wuk out. Deah wuz one boy bawn dat way wut lib right yuh in Wite Bluff an he wine up by bein in duh chain-gang an dat sho nuff bad luck."

"But dis lill plant heah called 'Cherokee' is spose tuh bring good luck ef yuh plants it by duh front doe step,"[24c] said Susie.

In this community as in many others strangers are not allowed to be buried in the local cemetery but in what is known as the "strangers lot," a piece of ground set apart from the cemetery proper. The custom of bringing the dead back to their original home for interment is also prevalent throughout coastal Georgia. The body of a young man who recently died in New York was brought back to White Bluff for burial. Relative to this custom, Susie spoke quietly. "Dey alluz brings um back tuh bury um ef dey kin git duh money, cuz yuh see duh spirit'll jis wanduh roun an nebuh be satisfied lesn it brung back home tuh be buried."[1]

"I know Lunnon Grayson know all bout dem tings too. Yuh tun off tuh duh lef at duh fus road leadin off frum duh highway yuh. Ax anybody den, an dey'll tell yuh wich is his house. He use tuh lib on St. Catherines too, but he come up yuh long fo me an Susie," Sophie said.

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SUNBURY

795 Savannah an he is dressed in a long robe. He walk long an
796 duh folks all mahch behine im. Dey goes down tuh duh rib-
(292) buh an sing as dey go. Dey alluz hab duh baptizin wen duh
(783) tide is goin out so duh watuh will wash duh sins away. Attuh
dey all gits tuh duh ribbuh, dey stop an duh preachuh ast
duh candidates tuh step fawwud. One by one he dip em in
duh watuh an dey is buried in baptism. Wen dey is all bap-
tize, duh preachuh pray tuh duh ribbuh an [33] ast dat all sins
be taken away. Den all duh folks sing an shout an praise
duh Lawd."

The little group leaning on the railing nodded in agree-
ment and as if in memory of the ceremony their bodies swayed
rhythmically. As we listened and watched we could almost
see the white robed procession winding to the river bank; we
could almost hear the chanting of the converts as their sins
were washed away.

764 The conversation turned to burial customs in the section
and the women told us that "settin-ups" were still held for
those who died.

"We all sit wid duh body an sing an pray an keep duh
spirit company," said one of them.

Another added, "At duh fewnul we sing an we puts our
(777) hands on duh cawpse tuh say goodbye. It bad luck not tuh
do dis," [31]

We had heard in other communities that in case of death
away from home the body is brought back to its native town
for burial. This custom is also prevalent in Sunbury, we
learned.

"Ebrybody wannuh be buried in deah own town," [1] Eliza-
(609) beth said. "An we nebuh bury strainjuhs wid our own folks.
Ef a strainjuh die yuh, we bury em in duh strainjuh's lot." [8]

775 Emma Stevens,* tall and slim, a baby in her arms and sev-
eral small children gathered about her, spoke up, "Yuh got

* *Emma Stevens, Sunbury.*

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grape arbor and spreading live oaks. On the side road stood three stately pine trees from which hung silvery festoons of Spanish moss. Catherine was black, small, and lively at sixty-nine.

"Ise bawn in Meridian," she said, "but Ise lib mos muh life heah. Muh people belong tuh duh Atwoods uh Darien an tings heah on duh ilun is pretty much duh way dey wuz deah. Some tings is changed wut hadduh change, lak wen we hab a fewnul duh unduhtakuh come an git duh body an dey dohn lak yuh tuh hab no settin-up. In duh ole days we would sing an make prayuh all night an dey would come an measure duh body wid a string tuh make duh coffin tuh bury em in. Dey use tuh alluz sen yuh home tuh bury[1] ef dey could git duh money but dey ain eben alluz do dat no mo. Dey nebuh use tuh bury no strainjuhs in duh buryin[2] groun but heah dat ain kep strick needuh."

We asked about the dances and festivals of her youth.

"We use tuh hab big times duh fus hahves,[16] an duh fus ting wut growed we take tuh duh chuch so as ebrybody could hab a piece ub it. We pray obuh it an shout. Wen we hab a dance, we use tuh shout in a ring. We ain hab wut yuh call a propuh dance tuhday.

"One uh duh dances wuz call duh Buzzud Lope.[17] It's a long time sence we done it, but I still membuh it. We ain hab much music in doze days but dey use a drum tuh call duh people tuhgedduh wen dey gonuh hab games aw meetin.[26] It sho bin a long time sence I tought bout dem days."

Catherine told us that Ryna Johnson, who lived about a mile down the Harrington Road, was one of the oldest people on the island. Leaving the main highway, we followed the narrow, less traversed side road. It was a heavily wooded section. We viewed the massive-trunked hoary oak trees through a misty curtain of hanging moss. The fences along the road were covered with honeysuckle and wild grape. Shortly before we arrived at our destination, the road divided

2: Jones-Jackson L-5 (1973-1986) 1987
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123 arriving at New Jerusalem African Methodist Episcopal Church. I attended church service because one must go to church to see the greatest gathering of people, and one must have the minister's sanction for one's work if one is to gain cooperation during the research. I was introduced to the congregation, and after the service the islanders were warm and hospitable, as is the custom on the church ground and as is common practice in many southern communities. But once we left the grounds, most members of the community became very conservative and even hostile concerning the mechanics of their culture. Their reactions to me followed a specific pattern. First they asked, Whose daughter are you? Because I was not the daughter of anyone on the island, the next question was, Who are your people here? As I had no relatives on that island or any island, the next question was, Whom did I know, or whom was I visiting? When they learned that I neither knew nor was visiting anyone, [124] most interviews ended on the spot—even though most people had promised at church to offer their assistance.

Quite by coincidence, I gave an elderly lady a ride to Charleston. As I drove along the winding roads, she told me that she lived alone, loved to crab and fish, and took a "nip" for her arthritis every now and then. She had lived in the Wadmalaw community all her life and had a host of relatives and friends on neighboring islands up and down the Carolina/Georgia coast. She knew the traditions; later, she would be instrumental in helping me to learn them. Because this lady was socially active and was held in high esteem, she was ultimately able to provide me with acceptable answers to the questions Sea Islanders ask of all new faces. I became Miss Myma's "granddaughter" who lived away and came to visit every summer.[1] (My greatest accomplishment would be finally getting her to leave Wadmalaw and come to Michigan to visit me.)

123 Having a person well known and well respected to provide a lin-
609 eage helped in my approaches to the community. But since most people born on any given island know each other, I soon realized that I had the status of "outsider," and no outsiders, black or white, are welcomed warmly into Sea Island activities or viewed without suspicion until they have spent considerable time among the people, performing daily tasks and becoming involved in daily living activities. The people have long been ridiculed for their speech, life-style, and mannerisms. In addition, they are very much aware that their culture has been a topic of interest to folklorists, linguists, historians, and others since the

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early twentieth century.[2] Thus they are quite naturally suspicious of anyone taking notes, carrying equipment, or wandering about unaccompanied by a resident. The islanders are a proud, perceptive people and can very soon sense insincerity and patronizing attitudes. It generally requires more than an offer of cash payment, gifts, or other remunerations to motivate them to assist a researcher's study. Though it was not my original plan to become indoctrinated into Sea Island culture through hard labor, I learned very quickly that most of the islanders are active, "going" people. Those who are not engaged in city jobs are likely to be fishermen, farmers, carpenters, housewives, basket weavers, market people, or laborers in the produce fields. Often workers allowed me to accompany and assist them, and I found that the rewards for becoming involved in daily life through hard work were great indeed. Returning home from a day in the fields in an open-bed truck, listening to the islanders laughing, joking, and planning for the weekend, made the tasks I had accomplished that day seem easier. Equally important, I obtained some of the most interesting speech data while learning to make baskets or working in an okra field.

After five years of gathering information on the Sea Islands, I went to Africa in 1978 to compare the Sea Islanders' language and culture with the patterns of some of their ancestors. The Nigerian villagers' welcome was far warmer on my first introduction to their communities than the Sea Islanders' had been. Many of the elderly Igbo, Yoruba, and Ibebio women had never seen an African-American woman and walked some distances to see the *Indocha*, or what was termed a "white-black woman." The label was used not out of disrespect but for lack of a better one to refer to a person born from African heritage but raised speaking a European tongue. After I explained my purpose for coming far "across the water," I was never in need of anyone to assist in any efforts. The villagers were as eager to hear what words, customs, and traditions the Gullah speakers retained as I was to tell them. Their eagerness was sharpened by their fervent hope that somehow some of the language, literary traditions, and social customs had derived from their particular culture, whether Igbo, Yoruba, or Ibebio. Life among these people was fascinating and amazingly similar in some ways to the life patterns of the Sea Islanders, even after the passage of centuries. It is about these similarities in language, literature, and culture that I promised to write this book.

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621 given island in order to be accepted as a natural member of the commu-
602 nity. Members who are brought to the islands as spouses are recog-
nized as members by association with a known island family, but even
one who has been married to an islander for twenty or more years
never achieves the status of a full member of the community.

621 Membership is most often established through oral transmission of
lineage, as opposed to birth certificates or other documents. Thus one
602 is expected to know one's lineage, for this knowledge can mean the
613 difference between acceptance and rejection in any social setting. It is
normal protocol, for example, for a young person to undergo seem-
ingly intense interrogation by an older island resident who wishes to
place the younger person. If one can explain satisfactorily who one's
parents are, who one's parents' parents are, or even who one's cousins'
parents are, then kinship is established and one is viewed as a member
of the community to be accorded all due warmth and hospitality. The
• [609] islanders can be chilly and sometimes openly hostile to strangers,
black or white, who have no local kinship ties or affiliations.

596 As would be expected in such closed communities, familial ties,
marriages, and the concept of the extended family are taken with ut-
most seriousness. The extended family is an African-like social tradi-
tion on the Sea Islands, just as it is in most inland black communities;
acknowledging and readily accepting the obligations and responsi-
bilities due not only to one's spouse but also to one's spouse's family is
581 a part of island culture. The "conjugal bond is strong and literally lasts
588 until death parts the spouses," and common-law marriages are as valid
and stable in the eyes of the community as those marriages contracted
586 under law. There is a low incidence of divorce and separation. Dis-
agreements and conflicts do arise in Sea Island households, of course,
593 as they do in any household. But understanding and accepting the rela-
596 tionships inherited in an extended family appear to alleviate many of
the conflicts experienced in the sort of nuclear family that is charac-
teristic of European cultures, such as mother-in-law/daughter-in-law
[888] antagonism. Like the members of extended families in Africa, people
on the Sea Islands act with deference toward their elders, and most
elders accord a great degree of respect to young adults, especially
those with children. That is, conflicts are minimized because each
member acknowledges and respects the others' domains.[44]

582 Most of the inhabitants of any given island are related; thus mar-
000 riage between persons from the same island is not encouraged. Chil-

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178 199 192 tions, and a good education does not include the old vocabulary. The children do, however, still learn to speak and understand Gullah: they return home from school and community to extended families where older members are responsible for their discipline and training; the church services are rendered in an elite variety of Gullah; the schoolteachers are from the islands and often chastise the children in Gullah; and most of all, the islanders are in a majority and Gullah, not standard English or a variety thereof, is the accepted language of the community. In the near future, therefore, some version of Gullah will probably continue to exist as the language of the home and of the community.

181 609 Finally, the islanders remain as conservative about their culture as they ever were. As I have noted, they are hostile to strangers, and word of outsiders carries quickly. No one, black, white, or otherwise, can escape their cultural interrogations. They will want to know who each newcomer is, and why this person has arrived. But it is not true, I learned, that the islanders will remain hostile. Once one establishes oneself within a community (which often takes years to do), one will receive all possible warmth and hospitality and all the help one might need to carry out one's work.

000 In writing this book I promised to tell the story of the islanders as I saw it, and to the best of my ability, that is what I have done.

The end of that one!

[p. 150 is blank]

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Notes

Preface

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1. For a note on the usefulness of interdisciplinary approaches see David DeCamp, "Toward a Generative Analysis of a Post-Creole Speech Continuum," in *Pidginization and Creolization of Languages*, ed. Dell Hymes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 369.

2. For a detailed discussion of field procedures in general see Kenneth Goldstein, *A Guide for Field Workers in Folklore* (Hatboro, N.C.: Folklore Assoc., 1964).

3. See ibid., p. 21.

4. Juanita Jackson, Sabra Slaughter, and J. Herman Blake, "The Sea Islands as a Cultural Resource," *Black Scholar*, March 1974, pp. 32–39.

5. For further discussion of entrance into Sea Island communities see Patricia Nichols, "Linguistic Change in Gullah: Sex, Age, and Mobility" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1976).

6. Goldstein, *Guide for Field Workers*, p. 173.

Introduction

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1. The titles *Mr.* and *Miss* have more significance in Sea Island communities than they do outside. They are used in daily interaction with those who are felt to have earned particular respect, becoming part of their names.

2. See Lorenzo D. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 11–12.

Chapter 1

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1. Jackson, Slaughter, and Blake, "The Sea Islands as a Cultural Resource," p. 32.

2. These estimates were derived primarily from the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester (BCD) Council of Governments' *Report on Economically Less Developed Areas in the Berkeley Charleston Dorchester Region*, 1980.

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3. For a detailed discussion of the folk life and language of Sandy Island and the

[P. 169]

8: Smith Q-4,5 (no date) 1926
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CONCLUSION

178 538 (533) Of course there is much in the Gullah tradition that has already passed beyond recall, and much that is passing with this generation for lack of suitable recorders. "Hymns, songs, folk-stories, animal-myths, fables, aphorisms and proverbs, wit and humor, it has, and a great mass of unrecorded folk-lore, legend and tradition, preserved in this unstudied dialect like flies in amber; there are, peculiar to it, certain Rabelaisian *contes ridicules*, told in cabins with wild mirth," *histoires satyriques*, and ghastly *legendes macabres*," besides which the uncanny tales of Hoffman are puerile in power to chill, but harder to get at than the things banned by the Great Tabu.""

It is all interesting—superstitions, folk-lore, tales, songs, and dialect—and the literature that enshrines the Gullah tradition will always remain a significant chapter in the great book of human life.

000 As an example of the dialect itself there may be quoted

•[509] (83) [171] "Told to white people (only to men of course) rarely except under the loosening urge of whiskey, on special occasions such as a hunting or fishing expedition. The experience of Mrs. Elsie Clews Parsons on St. Helena Island in searching for material of this kind is both interesting and illuminating. She says: "The more or less obscene turns occurring now and then in the Bahaman tales are quite lacking in Carolina, whether as a result of natural indifference to the obscene or of greater sophistication, it is somewhat difficult to estimate. In the deliberate suppression of certain tales or 'tonsts', as drinking-verses are called in both the Sea Islands, and the Bahamas, the sophistication is plain enough. 'Some is so evil, I don' like to go t'rough wid 'em;' said one who failed to tell me the many 'tons'' he had boasted of knowing. Tale No. 78, 'Man Under the Bed,' a variant of the well-known European tale of 'The Woman and the Friar', is one of the commonest of Bahaman tales. One day I happened to ask Mr. Jack if he knew it. 'Oh, you want dem kin' o' tales too! I could tell you a heap o' dem tales, but I blush fo' you,' he said. 'You must not,' I rejoined, 'for it is my business to take down all kinds of tales, no matter what they are about, and just as they are.' Finally, out of the 'heap o' dem tales', he told me the very tale I had referred to, as well as one other tale of which a variant is familiar on Andros Island, 'The Three Sweet-hearts,' (No. 77). James Murray said that he knew twenty-five or thirty 'man's tales'; 'but,' added he, and too firmly for challenge, 'I wouldn' go t'rough wid 'em.' Artistic story-teller as he was, he would forego part of the point of a story rather than commit the moral impropriety of telling it. 'I leave it dere,' he would say. White story-writers, like Harris or Jones or Christensen, have left it there, too, I infer. Indeed, Mrs. Christensen has told me that, faithful recorder as she was, on this point she had been selective: the stories she found 'vulgar' she had not taken." *Folk-Lore of the Sea-Islands*, Preface, XX, XXI.

A hint of the latent vulgar possibilities is found in the *double-entendre* riddles Nos. 29, 30, 31, 32 (pp. 156, 157), on which Mrs. Parsons makes no comment.

"One of which Mr. Bennett has himself brilliantly re-created in *Madame Margot*, The Century Co., 1921.

"Bennett, II, 52.